

December of this year, over 161,000 beneficiaries will receive a Social Security check that is reduced by a whopping \$234.60 for the month. That is why over thirty-five senior organizations, including the AARP, the Gray Panthers, Alliance for Retired Americans, National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, National Council on Aging and the United Jewish Communities to name a few, have contacted Members of Congress urging immediate action on reauthorizing this program.

As many of my colleagues know, the Qualified Individual program has suffered from uncertain reauthorization and funding since it expired in 2002. Since its expiration, it has hobbled along on a series of Continuing Resolutions—falling on the mercies of our oft-hurried appropriations process. I firmly believe that this program is of utmost importance—that costs us so little when we consider its impact. We should reauthorize it with all due speed, not subject it to the hurricane relief tennis match between the House and Senate leadership.

In the alternative, H.R. 3800, a bill introduced last month by Representatives KUCINICH and LATOURETTE, of which I am a cosponsor, is a straightforward bipartisan bill to extend the Qualified Individual program for one year. I applaud these Members for their leadership on its introduction.

If we cannot wrest the QI-1 program out of the political volley surrounding hurricane funding, I urge the House leadership to bring H.R. 3800 to the floor for immediate consideration and passage. We have the power to fix this and I urge my colleagues to reauthorize the QI-1 program now.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 501, legislation that will extend the important Transitional Medical Assistance and Qualified Individuals programs. Over the past few years, these programs have been reauthorized by short-term extensions that offer low-income beneficiaries of the programs few assurances that they will be able to depend on the benefits in the future. While I support this extension bill, Congress should be acting I today to make these programs permanent.

The TMA program provides an important incentive for low-income individuals to move off of welfare and into employment by ensuring continued access to health care. Health insurance is a critical factor in everyone's employment decisions. Without TMA, many families would have little incentive to move off of welfare and leave behind the Medicaid benefits that TANF beneficiaries often receive. TMA allows for extended health care coverage when low-income families lose traditional Medicaid benefits due to an increase in income. While four months of TMA coverage is assured under current law, the six-to-twelve month extension that families so often need falls under a legislative sunset. While our action today will extend this coverage, we should be making this extension permanent.

Likewise, we should be acting today to make Medicare's QI-1 program permanent. This program is critical for Medicare beneficiaries whose income is between 120% and 135% of the federal poverty level, as it provides these individuals with assistance with their Medicare Part B premiums. Since Qualified Individuals are not otherwise eligible for Medicaid, the QI-1 program is critical in ensuring low-income seniors' access to physician care.

Mr. Speaker, I support the efforts of the bill sponsor to swiftly enact this important legislation. However, I regret that it includes extraneous provisions that would limit Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries' access to certain classes of prescription drugs. Physicians, not Congress, know best when a prescription drug is medically necessary, and the government should not interject in decisions between a patient and his doctor I about the proper course of treatment.

Despite those reservations, this bill offers important benefits to low-income individuals' access to health care, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that the House and Senate have finally worked out their differences to extend two programs that provide important health care assistance for low-income elderly and working families.

The Qualified Individual, QI, program provides assistance with the cost of Medicare premiums for certain low-income individuals. The Transitional Medicaid Program, TMA, provides temporary Medicaid coverage to families moving off of welfare to the workforce.

This legislation considered today merely provides a short-term extension. I continue to believe, however, that these programs should be made permanent. First, they are good programs that provide much needed assistance. Second, we should avoid the situation we find ourselves in now, particularly with respect to the QI program, where States and CMS were unsure whether or how to continue the program as funding expired on September 30.

We must also consider making program improvements to both programs that would simplify enrollment and retention of eligible individuals. I recently reintroduced legislation, H.R. 3980, the Medicare Beneficiary Assistance Improvement Act, to address this matter in the QI program. And I have also included such provisions for the TMA program in H.R. 2071, the Family Care Act of 2005, which I reintroduced earlier this year.

Finally, I have concerns about the provision we are using to pay for these extensions. This provision strikes Medicare and Medicaid coverage of particular drugs that had been previously covered. The provision, in the out years, raises more revenue than is needed for these short-term program extensions. We should have saved the remainder to use for another day. But despite these reservations, there is great urgency in extending the QI and TMA programs, so I am supporting the package.

Mr. MCCRERY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATHAM). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. MCCRERY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 501.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair

declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 23 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1615

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON) at 4 o'clock and 15 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair announces that further proceedings on the motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 2744 will resume tomorrow.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY IN KATRINA'S WAKE

(Mrs. SCHMIDT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. SCHMIDT. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I attended a Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee meeting entitled "A Vision and Strategy For Rebuilding New Orleans." I found it to be interesting, and I am excited for the opportunity to help rebuild one of America's great cities. It is an undertaking that we must take seriously.

Amid the allegations that Katrina evacuees' relief supplies were found in the garages of government officials, it is obvious that there is a lot of potential abuse for misspending \$100 billion of Federal money. It is with this in mind that I felt the need to urge my colleagues to exercise discretion when authorizing additional funding.

Following yesterday's subcommittee meeting, I knew that I had a duty to speak on behalf of the American taxpayers. Only after intense scrutiny and with due diligence should we appropriate additional funds, making sure that government is doing its job, rebuilding the schools and infrastructure.

There were two statements given in testimony that were particularly troubling to me. First was the mayor, who wants now to have a light rail system to facilitate future evacuations. Now, I am all for rebuilding New Orleans, but this is not an opportunity to get your Christmas list out and go fishing on pet projects.

The other was the statement from the Governor. Someone on the committee asked how much money Louisiana had spent to date. She had no